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ABSTRACT

Of a random sampling of 500 persons living in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, 167 were in the 21 to 34 age group whose newspaper reading habits and attitudes toward newspapers were being studied. The profile of that group's attitudes toward news media, particularly newspapers, shows that these young adults are less "newspaper oriented" than adults over the age of 35, having generally more favorable attitudes toward television than toward newspapers. The 21 to 34 age group showed the highest interest in newspaper content, especially consumer information, that might help them in their day-to-day lives. If newspapers want to reach more young adult readers, they should improve the ease of reading, appear more modern, and offer more content bearing directly upon young adults' daily living habits. (RL)

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## The 21-34 Year Old Market And The Daily Newspaper

By Ernest F. Larkin, Gerald L. Grotta and Philip Stout

HIGHLIGHTS: Young adults have differing lifestyles than their older counterparts and are less "newspaper oriented." Newspapers seeking to reach more young adult readers should:

* Improve ease of reading and appear more modern, and
* Offer more content bearing directly upon the day-to-day lives of young adults.

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Filling the newshole used to be the main concern of daily newspaper editors.

That has changed dramatically. Circulation and readership problems are becoming the primary concern of editors. When the total circulation of daily newspapers declined in 1974, it focused attention on a problem that goes back a lot further—declining penetration of households and declining readership of newspapers in general.

Particularly disturbing has been the apparent rapid decline of newspaper readership among the young, although there still is debate over the magnitude and relevance of the problem.

This study was commissioned by the ANPA News Research Center to further explore the problem. Not surprisingly, the problem is complex and there do not seem to be any simple solutions. Some of the findings are encouraging and others are disturbing.

In this study, we conducted 500 interviews with a random sample of persons living in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. The interviews were conducted during the summer and fall of 1976. Of the total sample, 167 (33%) were between 21 and 34 years of age—the target group for this study.

### Findings In Brief

• People in the 21-34 year old age group clearly are less "newspaper oriented" than people 35 and older. They are not strongly negative toward newspapers, but seem to be rather apathetic about them. Mass media in general—and newspapers in particular—tend to be peripheral to their lives, something to do when the "important things" are finished.

• In general, the contrasts between 21-34 year olds and those 35 and older also follow the same trend

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within the 21-34 age group. That is, the younger they are, the less "newspaper oriented" they tend to be.

- Television is used primarily for entertainment and newspapers are used more for specific information.

- People in the 21-34 year old group have different life-styles than those 35 and older. These different life-styles seem to relate to attitudes toward, uses of and interest in content of newspapers.

- The 21-34 year olds are generally more favorable toward television than toward newspapers. They consider television more accurate, informative, ethical, easier to use, more relaxing and more essential than newspapers. Newspapers are considered more helpful and economical, but also most biased and most old-fashioned.

- If newspapers are to strengthen their position in the 21-34 year old age group, they must expand their efforts to make themselves more relevant for this group. These efforts should include:

—Expanding content of interest to younger adults

—Making the newspaper easier to use

- Changing the image of being 'old fashioned'

## Profile of the 21-34 Year Old

*They have more favorable attitudes toward television, in general, than toward newspapers.*

People in the survey were asked to rank newspapers, television, magazines and radio on the basis of ten characteristics. The 21-34 year old group clearly considers television the most accurate, most informative, most ethical, easiest to use, most relaxing and most essential of the four media.

Newspapers ranked first as most helpful and most economical, but also are considered the most biased and most old-fashioned of the media.

Comparisons of the four media across the ten characteristics are shown in Table 1.

*This age group views television primarily as an entertainment medium while newspapers are used mainly for specific information of particular interest or use to them.*

The 21-34 year olds agreed with the statement, "Television is our primary source of entertainment." They also agreed that they would rather watch entertainment on television than news programs.

However, they disagreed with the statement, "I prefer comics and feature stories in the newspaper to the regular news stories."

*In general, the 21-34 year olds appear to have ambivalent attitudes toward media bias and performance.*

This group agreed that they like what they see on television. However, they also agreed that there is too much violence on television and that television often covers up stories which they feel should be reported.

**Table 1**

Comparative Rankings of Four Media Across Ten Characteristics by 21-34 Year Olds

| | Newspapers | Television | Magazines | Radio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Most: | | | | |
| Accurate | 2* | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Biased | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Informative | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Economical | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Essential | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Helpful | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Ethical | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Easy | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Old Fashioned | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Relaxing | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 |

*1 = most of the quality to 4 = least of the quality.

The same is true of newspapers. While they agreed that the newspaper they read does a good job of covering the news they are interested in, they also agreed that they would like to see more stories of their community on things to do and places to go. Other statements they agreed with included: "I think newspapers are slanted and do not present both sides of controversial issues," and "Newspapers often 'cover up' stories which I believe should be reported."

On the other hand, they disagreed with the following statements: "I think the people who run the daily newspaper are out of touch with the people of this community," "The newspaper I read tends to be more liberal than my political beliefs," and "I tend to agree with the editorial views of the newspaper I read."

They disagreed with both of the following statements: "I think television news is too brief and sketchy," and "I think newspapers leave out too much detail in their stories."

*The 21-34 year olds tend to have more favorable attitudes toward newspaper advertising than toward television advertising.*

While this age group disagreed slightly with the

statement, "I find advertising on television to be of little value and irritating," they strongly disagreed with a similar statement about newspaper advertising. They agreed with the statement, "If newspapers would cut out all advertising, I would find them less useful." However, they disagreed with a similar statement about television advertising.

*The 21-34 year olds feel they are getting their money's worth from the newspaper, but are not willing to pay more for it.*

This group disagreed with the statement, "I would be willing to pay more for newspapers if they had more items that interested me." However, the group disagreed with the statement, "I don't think I get my money's worth from the newspaper I read."

*This age group is most interested in content which can help them in their day-to-day lives.*

We asked people in the study to indicate for 34 different types of newspaper content whether they would like to see much more, more, the same amount, less or much less of each type in the newspaper.

Heading the list for which they wanted much more content was "consumer information" (how to shop for the 'best buys,' etc.), with 45% saying they would like much more and 37% saying they would like more—for a total of 82%.

Other types of content for which more than 50% of the 21-34 year olds would like either more or much more content were (in descending order): stories about schools and education, advertisements of special interest, how-to-do-it stories, feature stories, stories about local events, stories about national events, background information on complex issues, entertainment advertising (movies, plays, etc.), photos, movie reviews and schedules, recipes and cooking hints and gardening information.

At the bottom of the list, shown in Table 2, with a third or more wanting less or much less content, were: stories about hunting and fishing; engagements, weddings and other society news; automobile advertising; stories about clubs and organizations; stories about spectator sports, and stories about participant sports (golf, tennis, etc.).

*The 21-34 year olds tend to be more self- and family-oriented than community-oriented.*

Our 21-34 year olds said they admire rugged individualism and felt they have more self-confidence than others. They disagreed strongly that their life is dull.

This age group strongly agreed that they put their family's welfare before their own and that their community is a good place to live and raise a family. While they indicated that they like to vote on election day, they did not consider themselves influential in their community, they did not like to go to club meetings, and they were not active in community organizations such as the PTA.

These people tended to agree that job security is more important than money, and they also felt that their family income is high enough to satisfy all of their important wants.

While they felt there are too many people in the world today, this group also tended to like large families. They strongly disagreed with the idea that the older generation cannot hope to understand the younger generation.

Table 2

Desires for Content Changes by 21-34 Year Olds

| | Percentage Wanting Much More | More |
|---|---|---|
| Content | | |
| Consumer Information | 47 | 37 |
| Schools, Education | 30 | 40 |
| Ads of Interest | 32 | 34 |
| How-to-do-it | 39 | 27 |
| Features stories | 25 | 44 |
| Local stories | 26 | 39 |
| National stories | 28 | 32 |
| Background stories | 35 | 23 |
| Entertainment Ads | 23 | 34 |
| Photographs | 25 | 30 |
| Movie Reviews, Schedules | 24 | 33 |
| Recipes, Cooking Hints | 26 | 24 |
| Gardening | 25 | 28 |
| Restaurant Guides | 15 | 32 |
| Letters to editor | 24 | 19 |
| Clothing ads | 15 | 28 |
| Grocery ads | 19 | 20 |
| Camping, picnicking | 15 | 30 |
| Fashion stories | 15 | 27 |
| Church, religion news | 16 | 19 |
| Classified ads | 11 | 19 |
| Political news | 16 | 22 |
| Crime stories | 14 | 22 |
| Editorials | 11 | 23 |
| Advice columns | 14 | 18 |
| Alternative life styles | 13 | 16 |
| Comics | 13 | 13 |
| Furniture ads | 8 | 17 |
| Participant sports | 12 | 14 |
| Spectator sports | 10 | 17 |
| Clubs, organizations | 6 | 14 |
| Automobile ads | 5 | 15 |
| Society news | 7 | 9 |
| Hunting, fishing | 7 | 14 |

*Leisure-time activities tend to be unrelated with traditional newspaper content.*

The 21-34 year olds indicated a strong preference for outdoor activities. They strongly agreed with statements such as, "I love the fresh air and being out of doors," and "I like to work out of doors." They said they like to go for long walks and like to engage in athletic events regularly.

They were not frequent attenders of college athletic events and did not particularly enjoy talking about sporting events. For individual sports, they far preferred tennis to golf.

While this group said they would rather go to a sporting event than to a dance, they did enjoy parties with lots of music and good conversation. They tended to like card games, but agreed that cocktail parties are a waste of time.

As a group, the 21-34 year olds said that given a choice they would prefer a quiet evening at home to going to a party. They agreed with the statement, "After a long day's work, I really don't feel like doing much of anything in the evening." They disagreed that the morning is the low point of their day.

On vacations, these people said they want to rest and relax but also that vacations should be educational. They liked to take photographs and strongly disagreed that sewing in the home is old-fashioned. They were not particularly interested in cars and did not enjoy working on their car.

*The 21-34 year olds tend to be price-conscious.*

This group liked to pay cash for their purchases, and agreed that grocery shopping means sticking to a strict budget. However, they said they do not often seek out advice from friends regarding which brands to buy and that they usually did not check the newspaper for prices before going shopping.

*Personal appearance is important.*

The 21-34 year olds said they like to dress fashionably. They strongly agreed that when they are clean, they feel more energetic.

*Life-styles appear to relate to interest in various types of newspaper content.*

When we put together the results from the various parts of the interviews, some consistent patterns became obvious. For example, members of the group were interested in taking photographs and they would like to see more photos in the newspaper. They were concerned about personal finances and would like to see much more content in the newspaper devoted to consumer information. They were more personal than community oriented and would like more newspaper content on how-to-do-it, recipes and cooking hints and gardening information.

**Table 3**

Comparative Rankings of Four Media Across Ten Characteristics by 21-34 Year Olds and 35 and Older

| | Newspapers | | Television | | Magazines | | Radio | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 21-34 | 35 & Older | 21-34 | 35 & Older | 21-34 | 35 & Older | 21-34 | 35 & Older |
| % Selecting Each Medium Most: | | | | | | | | |
| Accurate | 31 | 41 | 50 | 49 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 14 |
| Biased | 48 | 51 | 25 | 30 | 28 | 17 | 8 | 9 |
| Informative | 37 | 57 | 48 | 50 | 17 | 12 | 11 | 13 |
| Economical | 49 | 41 | 25 | 27 | 6 | 4 | 32 | 50 |
| Essential | 37 | 59 | 46 | 38 | 7 | 4 | 18 | 18 |
| Helpful | 55 | 63 | 36 | 39 | 10 | 14 | 13 | 15 |
| Ethical | 31 | 39 | 40 | 37 | 18 | 19 | 18 | 19 |
| Easy | 29 | 41 | 61 | 56 | 3 | 9 | 23 | 33 |
| Old Fashioned | 40 | 38 | 6 | 10 | 24 | 23 | 32 | 42 |
| Relaxing | 14 | 29 | 52 | 50 | 17 | 24 | 29 | 32 |

*Percentages do not add to 100 in each category because of multiple responses by some of the people in the survey.

## Comparison of 21-34 Year Olds With People 35 and Older

While a profile of the 21-34 year old is valuable in gaining some initial insights into their attitudes and media usage habits, a comparison of this age group with individuals 35 and older provides an even better idea of some of the problems newspapers face with the younger adults.

*The 21-34 year olds are considerably less favorable toward newspapers than persons 35 and older.*

People in the 21-34 year old age group considered newspapers less accurate than did people 35 and older; conversely, they considered television more accurate. While those over 35 considered newspapers more informative than television, the opposite was true of the 21-34 year olds.

Perhaps even more disturbing for newspapers is the fact that while people over 35 considered newspapers the most essential of the media, those people 21-34 considered television more essential than newspapers. Those 35 and older considered newspapers more ethical than television, while those 21-34 considered television more ethical than newspapers.

On other characteristics shown in Table 3—easy to use, relaxing and old fashioned—both 21-34 year olds and those 35 and older gave television a more favorable rating than newspapers. However, the 21-34 year olds gave television a considerably bigger margin over newspapers than did people 35 and older.

*The 21-34 year olds are interested in different types of newspaper content than those 35 and older.*

From the 13 types of content in which the 21-34 year olds were most interested (more than 50% wanting more or much more), these are the ones in which they wanted to see greater increases than did those 35 and older:

- —Consumer information
- —Stories about schools and education
- —How-to-do-it articles
- —Background stories on complex events
- —Feature stories
- —Photographs
- —Movie reviews and schedules
- —Entertainment advertising (movies, plays, etc.)
- —Ads of special interest

Comparing Tables 2 and 4 the most striking differences between the two age groups are in the categories:

- —Movie reviews and schedules
- —Stories about alternative life styles
- —Entertainment advertising
- —Crime news
- —Feature stories
- —Photos
- —Stories about clubs and organizations
- —How-to-do-it articles
- —Restaurant guides
- —Stories about clothing styles and fashions
- —Classified advertising

Table 4

Desires for Content Changes by Age 35 and Older

| Content | Percentage Wanting Much More | More |
|---|---|---|
| Consumer Information | 49 | 24 |
| Schools, Education | 33 | 33 |
| Ads of Interest | 33 | 29 |
| How-to-do-it | 38 | 19 |
| Features stories | 26 | 25 |
| Local stories | 42 | 32 |
| National stories | 40 | 31 |
| Background stories | 39 | 20 |
| Entertainment Ads | 13 | 19 |
| Photographs | 23 | 19 |
| Movie Reviews, Schedules | 9 | 16 |
| Recipes, Cooking Hints | 31 | 22 |
| Gardening | 34 | 25 |
| Restaurant Guides | 18 | 21 |
| Letters to editor | 24 | 26 |
| Clothing ads | 18 | 19 |
| Grocery ads | 20 | 17 |
| Camping, picknicking | 20 | 20 |
| Fashion stories | 20 | 16 |
| Church, religion news | 29 | 25 |
| Classified ads | 9 | 14 |
| Political news | 17 | 22 |
| Crime stories | 13 | 10 |
| Editorials | 23 | 24 |
| Advice columns | 22 | 15 |
| Alternative life styles | 5 | 9 |
| Comics | 13 | 11 |
| Furniture ads | 8 | 12 |
| Participant sports | 16 | 14 |
| Spectator sports | 22 | 17 |
| Clubs, organizations | 7 | 8 |
| Automobile ads | 9 | 10 |
| Society news | 6 | 7 |
| Hunting, fishing | 17 | 13 |

These are the types of content which clearly fall into the general category of "tools for daily living," with few exceptions. For the most part, then, people 35 and older tended to be more interested in what we could call more traditional newspaper content, while those 21-34 were looking for information in the newspaper which has practical use in their daily lives.

*The 21-34 year olds tend to be more self-oriented and less community-oriented than those 35 and older.*

Our 21-34 year olds admired rugged individualism more strongly than people 35 and older. They also considered their lives less dull than those of older people. The people 35 and older were less concerned about dressing in the latest styles and were more concerned about job security.

People 35 and older agreed much more strongly that their family income is high enough to satisfy all of their important desires; felt much more strongly that their community is a good place to live and raise a family; agreed they are more influential in their communities; and were more pessimistic than the 21-34 year olds about the ability of older people to understand the younger generation.

People 35 and older were more interested in golf than in tennis, while the opposite was true for the 21-34 year olds. Those 35 and older said they enjoy talking about sports much more than do the 21-34 year olds. The older group agreed more strongly that they would rather go to a sporting event than to a dance, and they do not enjoy parties as much as the 21-34 year olds.

People 35 and older were less interested in card games and cocktail parties than people 21-34 and they agreed much more strongly that they would rather spend a quiet evening at home than go to a party.

Those 35 and older felt more strongly that a vacation should be a time to rest and relax and were far less interested in taking photographs than the 21-34 year olds.

Surprisingly, while those 35 and older did not feel as strongly that grocery shopping means sticking to a budget, they agreed far more strongly that they check the newspaper for prices before they go shopping.

## Using These Findings

These descriptions of young adults (and comparisons with those age 35 and older) provide specific guidance for newspaper promotion campaigns aimed at increasing readership among those in the 21-34 year old group. But a promotion campaign must be backed by news, features and advertising congenial to the interests, attitudes and content preferences of young adults. So these findings also are guidelines for editors seeking to increase young adult readership.

In Table 4 and elsewhere are the specific interests of younger and older adults in more than two dozen types of content. In analyzing their own newspaper, editors especially should note three clusters of content preferences:

- Those which both younger and older adults want more of. Every newspaper should have these kinds of items which will appeal to all adults.
- Those which appeal to younger adults more than older adults. This is the "extra" content needed to back up a promotion campaign aimed at young adults.
- Those which appeal to older adults more than younger adults. What is the balance between this cluster and the previous cluster? Is your newspaper catering equally to both groups with special interest content?

Beyond these specific content categories this research underscores the key interest of younger adults in all types of content, including advertising, which can help them in their day-to-day lives. This demands imagination and creativity on the part of editors and advertising directors to produce this kind of material appealing to younger adults.

This attitude among younger adults, plus the numerous other attitudes towards newspapers (and television, too) that are detailed here, pinpoint the themes necessary for promotion campaigns aimed at younger readers. There are existing strong points to be emphasized. (Newspapers already are perceived by younger adults as more heipful and more economical than TV or other mass media.) There are weak points that need strengthening. (Television is perceived as more informative and less biased.) Promotion efforts to reinforce or change these images must be backed by actual content in the newspaper. This research outlines what kinds of content are needed.

This kind of effort is summed up by Robert G. Marbut, president of Harte-Harks Newspapers:

". . . our changing society is having a dramatic influence on the informational needs of the market place.

The trend is toward greater fragmentation . . . more specialization. The homogeneous mass audience of yesterday is giving way to the heterogeneous audience of tomorrow . . .

"Therefore, in order to respond effectively to both the opportunities and threats implicit in this scenario, the newspaper can no longer count on the haphazard approach of yesterday. Instead, a new approach is required—the marketing approach—in which the needs of the customers become the central concern."

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